



GSA Public Buildings Service



A GSA Safety Guide



Reading this guide could save your life!

To All GSA Associates:

As GSA's Designated Safety and Health Official (DASHO), it is my responsibility to provide guidance, issue internal program directives, and establish program priorities in support of the agency-wide Occupational Safety and Health Program.

Do you know how to report unsafe and unhealthful working conditions? How to recognize hazardous materials? Or what to do if you are injured on the job? If not, you need to read this guide. You will find the answers to many questions you may have about—

- GSA's safety program;
- Your rights and responsibilities in ensuring a safe and healthful work environment;
- Procedures for reporting unsafe or unhealthful working conditions; and
- Safety procedures to follow in GSA workplaces and your office space.

And, if you're not convinced that safety in the workplace is an issue for you, consider the following:

- Five percent of GSA's workforce is injured every year. In fact, one out of every 32 GSA associates suffers a job-related injury or illness serious enough to require medical examination or treatment. Many other job-related injuries and illnesses go unreported or may not require medical attention. These may result in:
 - Associates enduring unnecessary pain and suffering;
 - Time missed from work with possible loss of wages; and
 - Loss of productivity that prevents GSA from delivering finished products to our customers.
- Statistics show that, for over 10 years, the Federal Government annually has paid \$1 billion or more for medical expenses and workers' compensation to Federal associates or survivor benefits based on job-related injuries or illnesses. Of that amount, GSA's share is approximately \$16 million each year out of its own budget.

Working together is key to keeping us all safe and healthy and to eliminating unnecessary expenses. I ask you to please read this guide and keep it handy for easy reference at your workstation. It will provide the tools you need to make a difference in how safe you are while at work.

Sincerely,

F. Joseph Moravec
Commissioner

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—Safety Guide—

Environmental Strategies and Safety Division

Section 1: How is GSA's Safety and Health Program Organized?

a. Who is responsible for GSA's Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) program?

The Commissioner, Public Buildings Service, is the designated official to represent and support an agency-wide occupational safety and health program. As the Designated Agency Safety and Health Official (DASHO), he or she has the authority and responsibilities mandated by Federal statute.

b. Who implements GSA's OSH Program?

The DASHO implements the program through his professional safety and health staff from the Environmental Strategies and Safety Division (PXE).

c. What legal authorities and standards establish the criteria for implementing the OSH Program?

GSA Order ADM P 5940.1, GSA Occupational Safety and Health Program, establishes the basic guidelines that PXE must implement throughout the agency. While numerous other safety and health standards, such as directives, regulations, codes, etc., also apply to the Federal workplace, you can find most of the ones that apply to your job in the following publications, which your supervisor is required to make available to you when you request them:

- **Public Law 91-596:** Occupational Safety and Health Act (December, 29, 1970), which assures safe and healthful working conditions for all working people.
- **Executive Order 12196:** Occupational Safety and Health Programs for Federal Employees (February 26, 1980), which the President signed, and which states the specific responsibilities for the Heads of Federal Agencies to support occupational safety and health programs.
- **Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1910:** Occupational Safety and Health Standards, which the Department of Labor published in 1972 under Public Law 91-596. The standards consist of 20 subparts, each one containing numerous safety or health requirements that may concern your work. Each subpart title has an accompanying list that you should review, since you are required to know the safety precautions in all subparts that relate to your work or that deal with any conditions you are routinely exposed to. See below for the numbers and titles of these subparts.

Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1910

<u>Subpart</u>	<u>Subject</u>
A	General
B	Adoption and Extension of Established Federal Standards
C*	General Safety and Health Provisions
D*	Walking-Working Surfaces
E*	Means of Egress
F	Powered Platforms, Manlifts, and Vehicle-Mounted Work Platforms
G*	Occupational Health and Environmental Control
H*	Hazardous Materials
I*	Personal Protective Equipment
J*	General Environmental Controls
K	Medical and First Aid
L	Fire Protection
M	Compressed Gas and Compressed Air Equipment
N*	Materials Handling and Storage
O*	Machinery and Machine Guarding
P	Hand and Portable Powered Tools and Other Hand-Held Equipment
Q	Welding, Cutting, and Brazing
R	Special Industries
S*	Electrical
T	Commercial Diving Operations
Z*	Toxic and Hazardous Substances

* These subparts may apply to a major portion of GSA employees.

- **Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1960:** Basic Program Elements for Federal Employee Occupational Safety and Health Programs and Related Matters (45 FR 69796, October 21, 1980, amended January 25, 1984), in which the President assigns the Secretary of Labor responsibilities for developing program guidance for the heads of Federal Agencies, with details of these in Part 1960.

- **Consensus Standards:** These standards may support Federal laws and regulations and will probably cover those particular jobs that 29 CFR 1910 does not. They are established by organizations, such as the American Standards Institute, (ANSI), National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), National Safety Council (NSC), American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM), and Underwriters Laboratory (UL).

d. Who handles all GSA associates' safety and health concerns and how do they do so?

The Regional Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Program staff represent associates in Regions 1 through 10, while the Safety, Environment, and Fire Prevention Branch of the National Capital Region handles safety and health concerns for Central Office and National Capital Region associates.

GSA also has adopted the occupational safety and health committee system to help Regional Administrators meet safety program goals and objectives, as well as handle concerns you might have. These committees have an equal number of management and non-management members, with safety professionals normally acting as technical advisors. If you sit on these committees, your duties include:

- Inspecting for safety;
- Investigating unsafe/unhealthful working conditions that associates report;
- Recommending ways that managers can improve their local safety program or take corrective action to prevent accidents;
- Reviewing proposed GSA safety standards and commenting on them;
- Monitoring and recommending changes in resources for the safety program; and
- Requesting, in certain situations, assistance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

And, if you have any questions about the safety organization in GSA, ask your supervisor or your local safety committee members.

Section 2: What Should I Know About Reporting Unsafe and Unhealthful Working Conditions?

One of the most important aspects of GSA's Occupational Safety and Health Program is that you have the right to report unsafe or unhealthful working conditions.

a. How do I report unsafe or unhealthful working conditions?

If you believe any exist, immediately report them to your supervisor, who will take corrective action if he or she agrees the hazard exists.

b. What can I do if my supervisor does not correct the condition?

You have the right to report the condition to your regional OSH Program staff, or, if you are a Central Office associate, to the Safety, Environment, and Fire Protection Branch (WPX) at the National Capital Region using GSA Form 3592 (GSA Report of Unsafe or Unhealthy Working Conditions). Within 15 days of receiving it, the Branch or OSH Program staff must investigate your report and notify you of their findings.

c. How can I appeal the matter if I'm still not satisfied?

At this point, you have the right to discuss the matter further with the GSA Designated Agency Safety and Health Official (the Commissioner, Public Buildings Service), who will ensure it is investigated.

Section 3: How Do I Report Job-Related Accidents?

You are responsible for reporting any accident to your supervisor as soon as possible, no matter how it occurred, what types of injuries or damage are involved, or who was involved or responsible for it. Your supervisor is required to submit the GSA accident report to the regional safety office. If you have an accident, you have the right to receive medical treatment, and where the Office of Worker's Compensation Program (OWCP), Department of Labor, justifies it, to compensation for a job-related accident.

Section 4: What Are Some General Safety Rules I Should Follow While Working at GSA?

Because these general safety rules—some are just common sense—apply to all aspects of your job while you work at GSA and contribute to all GSA employee and visitors' well-being, be sure you:

- Report all hazards immediately;
- Always look out for any conditions that may cause injuries or damage property;
- Hold on to handrails when using stairways;
- Obey all warning signs;
- Are familiar with procedures for fires or other emergencies, including what to do and where to go;
- Immediately notify people in the area, sound the alarm, and leave the building when you notice a fire;
- Always use a stairwell during fires or other emergencies—never use the elevator;
- Refrain from all horseplay, scuffling, fighting, or practical jokes, as GSA does not tolerate these activities in the workplace;
- Refrain from running, as GSA prohibits this in the workplace; and
- Only do jobs you know how to do and talk about any tasks you don't know how to do with your supervisor before attempting them.

Section 5: What Practices Should I Follow to Maintain a Safe Office?

Contrary to popular opinion, office accidents, even though they aren't usually life threatening, contribute to a large number of lost workdays for GSA associates. To help prevent these types of accidents in your work environment, you should:

- Keep file drawers closed when you're not using them;
- Open only one file drawer at a time;
- Open the top drawer of a file cabinet carefully because the center of gravity shifts dramatically and may cause the cabinet to tip over;
- Fill a file cabinet from the bottom up rather than the top down;
- Consider anchoring file cabinets to the floor or wall, if possible, to prevent them from tipping;
- Store hazardous materials, such as cleaning solvents and aerosols, in places that have been approved for storing them, not in file cabinets;
- Use a step ladder for climbing, never a chair;
- Make sure you read the labels on office products before using them, as many are toxic or harmful;
- Keep all aisles clear of obstacles, such as cords, waste baskets, and utility outlets that protrude;
- Keep floors dry by wiping up spilled liquids immediately;
- Pick up papers, pencils, and paper clips from the floor as soon as you see them;
- Dispose of solvent-soaked or oily rags for cleaning equipment and other purposes in the proper closed containers as soon as you are finished using them;
- Refrain from using wastepaper baskets for ashtrays; and
- Only move desks or file cabinets if you've been trained to do so and when you have the proper moving equipment, such as a handtruck or dolly.

Section 6: What Do I Need to Know before Lifting?

Be sure you know the do's and don'ts of lifting, because most office and industrial workers routinely lift improperly without giving the issue much thought. In fact, back injuries resulting from improper lifting have reached critical proportions at GSA and cost over a half-million dollars each year. This is why we have developed special back-injury training programs to help you and all associates save yourselves unnecessary pain and expense. Here are some basic do's and don'ts on lifting:

Do:

- Check the immediate area and route where you will carry your load to make sure you won't encounter obstacles or hazards that could make you fall, slip, trip, or strike against something;
- Assess the load before you pick it up and, if it appears too heavy or large, get help;
- Stand close to the load, placing one foot beside it and the other foot slightly behind you to keep your balance;
- Use the “sit down” or squat position and keep your back straight. Your back doesn't have to be perpendicular to the floor—just be sure you don't curve or hunch it;
- Tuck your chin in comfortably so your neck and head are in a straight line with your back;
- Use a proper grip—one of the most important aspects of lifting correctly—by extending your fingers and hands around the object you're lifting using your whole palm. (You need to use your whole hand, since fingers alone have very little power.)
- Keep your arms tucked in to your body, since the closer they are to your torso, the more strength you have;
- Center your body weight over your feet to give yourself a more powerful line of thrust and better balance;
- Begin lifting smoothly and evenly by using your leg muscles without transferring the weight to your back and by keeping the load close to your body; and
- Move deliberately at a comfortable speed to avoid sudden or jerking motions that will hurt your spine or strain back muscles.

Don't:

- Twist your body—which is the culprit for possible back injuries; instead, turn your forward foot out and point it in the direction you are moving; or
- Fight to recover a “lost” or “dropped” load; instead, get out of the way and let it drop.

Note, too, that many people experience back pain that results from their personal lifestyles or homes. If you're experiencing back pain that you can't explain, you might want to look into these possible causes that may not be related to your job:

- Stress;
- Poor posture;
- Poor physical conditioning; or
- Excess weight.

Section 7: What Electrical Safety Precautions Should I Learn?

Electrical hazards may pose silent dangers, such as defective wiring, and people often misuse equipment because they are unaware of or fail to appreciate these dangers. Therefore, you should carefully learn and follow the precautions below, especially if your job involves building maintenance or repair, or if you use power tools:

- Only attempt to repair electrical equipment, such as cords, fuses, or circuit breakers, if you are qualified to do so. Otherwise, leave the condition alone and report it to your supervisor or another proper authority.
- Make sure that, if you must use portable electrical tools, they are grounded or double insulated, which you can identify by a marking on the tool or a three-wire plug. And, if the ground prong of any three-wire plug has been removed, do not use the tool.
- Personally examine every electrical tool before using it and, if it is defective, remove it from service and tag it with “OUT OF SERVICE,” “DO NOT USE,” or some other established term.
- Do not use a “cheater plug.” That’s the one that fits into a two-hole outlet with a “pig tail” secured to the wall plate with a screw.
- Never splice or tape a defective electrical cord, as this is a job that only a qualified technician must do according to specific guidelines. Instead, you should replace the defective cord.
- Pull on the plug—not the cord—when disconnecting electrical cords.
- Make sure, if your job is to work on electrical equipment, that it has been shut off at the energy source, and that you lockout/tagout (using either a key or combination lock and the appropriate warning device to indicate that energy isolating procedures have been implemented on the equipment) the equipment at its source.
- Never wear jewelry around live electrical equipment.
- Make sure you have ample space, especially behind you, to work.
- Never use electrical tools in damp or wet areas.

Section 8: What Should I Know About Personal Protective Equipment?

Certain jobs in GSA require that you use or wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as a condition of your employment, without exceptions. Usually, if your job requires you use PPE, you also must enroll in a medical surveillance program, for which GSA covers the costs.

a. When should I use protective devices?

Your supervisor will inform you whether your duties require PPE, what types you must use, and why. He or she then will issue you the necessary equipment, which you must care for as you would your own. Be sure you keep all PPE clean and serviceable. You are responsible for letting your supervisor know when GSA needs to repair or replace your equipment; GSA will cover for the costs.

b. What are some examples of tasks that require specific equipment or clothing?

The following are examples of when you must use PPE and receive medical examinations:

- If you work in a noise hazard area, at or above 85 decibels, you must use hearing protection and may have to have annual audiometric tests.
- If working with asbestos, you must wear full body protection and a respirator and annually undergo pulmonary function (lung capacity) tests. Depending on your age, you also may have to have annual chest X-Rays.
- If you work with lead or are exposed to other hazardous chemicals, you usually must have periodic blood tests. And, depending on your exposure, you also may need other medical tests.

Note, too, that if your work requires you to use a respirator, you must be tested to ensure it fits properly, since the smallest leak could allow the hazardous material to enter your breathing zone.

c. What are some examples of protective clothing or equipment my job may require?

You may need to use:

- Eye protection, if your job could expose you to flying particles, such as in shops with wood- or metalworking machines. In addition, if you wear prescription glasses, they must have safety lenses, which GSA will issue you at no expense to you;
- Special eye, hand, and torso protection if you are a welder;
- Gloves for any tasks in which you must handle solvents, and which are approved for the specific solvent you are using; or
- Safety (hard-toed, high-top) footwear and head protection, such as bump caps or hard hats, which many tasks and occupations require.

Section 9: How Should I Handle Hazardous Materials?

Since your job in GSA may expose you to hazardous materials, you should carefully read the following guidelines.

a. What are hazardous materials and how do I know if my job requires I use them?

These are any substances that may cause injuries or illnesses when you expose yourself to them. You can recognize them if the can or package label says “caution,” “warning,” “toxic,” or any similar word or phrase. In addition, your supervisor should let you know about any hazardous substance you must deal with.

b. What kind of training do I need before handling hazardous materials?

Regardless of your position in GSA, if you have access to any hazardous materials, you must attend the appropriate safety, health, and fire training that also familiarizes you with the signs and symptoms of adverse effects from exposure. If you don't know the harmful effects or appropriate precautions for using a substance, ask pertinent questions before you start.

Also, you are required to use personal protective equipment, such as eye protection, aprons and special gloves, when working with certain hazardous materials, such as strong caustics, acids, or other reactive chemicals. So, be sure you know what to wear and how to wear it.

c. Why should I have access to a Material Safety Data Sheet?

You must have access to a Material Safety Data Sheet for each hazardous material you encounter, since they contain all the information you need to protect yourself from any harmful effects. Your supervisor should request these from the manufacturer, and, if one is not available for any material you will work with, make sure he or she requests one immediately. Note, however, that these sheets are not substitutes for any training you need.

d. How do I handle suspicious and possibly contaminated mail?

GSA has issued a publication, "Making Federal Buildings Safe," which provides critical information on precautions for identifying and handling suspect mail, actions for handling telephone and bomb threats and information on who to contact in case of an emergency. The publication is accessible at www.gsa.gov.

Section 10: What Do I Need to Know before Operating Machinery?

If you must operate machinery as part of your job at GSA:

- Make sure that the required guards and safety devices are in place and properly adjusted and that everyone is in the clear before starting machinery. It is best to follow this rule of thumb: **If it moves up and down, back and forth, or turns and is less than seven feet from the working surface, it must have a guard.** Some examples are: grinding wheels, power saws, power transmission belts/rods, and fan blades;
- Never remove or try to adjust a guard when the machine is operating;
- Only attempt to repair a machine when there is no possibility that you or some one else could start it without intending to or without your knowledge;
- Make sure the power is off and the starting device is under your control through a lockout/tagout procedure before repairing a machine;
- Test whether a wood- or metal-working machine's control switches are within your arm's reach and all controls are accessible from your operating position before turning it on;
- Use your required personal protection devices as required;
- Keep all machinery, especially cutting edges, clean and in good working order;
- Ring test (sound) a replacement abrasive wheel before fastening it on the tool to prevent it from suddenly flying into high-speed fragments and injuring someone; and
- Anchor non-portable machines for fixed operating locations to the working surface.
- Never wear jewelry (especially rings or long necklaces or chains); loose, long hair; or loose fitting clothing when operating machinery.

Section 11: What Do's and Don'ts Should I Know Before Driving a Vehicle for Work Purposes?

Be sure you keep your wits about you and the following points in mind when driving a car or truck as part of your GSA duties:

Do:

- Use a seatbelt for the driver and all passengers when the vehicle is moving, as GSA and many State laws mandate;
- Properly adjust all seatbelts or other restraining devices to protect yourself and other passengers;
- Report any accident you have to your supervisor and the appropriate fleet management office;
- Care for anyone who is injured in an accident, as your first responsibility;
- Make sure the vehicle you are going to drive is in proper condition and safe by checking tires, brakes, wipers, fluid levels, and lights, as well as by moving it a few feet and checking for leaks; and
- Obey all traffic laws, State and local. Note, too, that GSA does not pay for any traffic fines you receive, no matter whose vehicle you are driving or how official the trip may be.

Don't:

- Drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, including some prescription drugs;
- Drive a GSA motor vehicle if you do not have a license to drive from your State of residence, your State of employment (including the District of Columbia), or a recognized Federal jurisdiction; or
- Drive a vehicle for official purposes if you currently are under driving suspension from any U.S. jurisdiction.

And, since you receive the privilege to drive for work purposes from both the State and GSA, remember that either can revoke this privilege if you don't follow the rules for safe driving.



Smarter Solutions



U.S. General Services Administration

Office of Business Operations - PX

Environmental Strategies and Safety Division - PXE

1800 F St., NW

Washington, DC 20405

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